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Tafoya (right) in custody: A small-town trial with links to the CIA and Libyan terrorism

A Soldier Out in the Cold?

The quiet college town of Ft. Collins, Colo., seems an unlikely setting for international-terrorist intrigue. But behind a metal detector and a posse of armed guards, a drama is unfolding in the Larimer County courthouse that could link Libyan strongman Muammar Kaddafi and a shadowy former CIA agent named Edwin Wilson to an attempted assassination in the United States. On trial is Eugene Tafoya, 47, a Wilson associate and former Green Beret charged with conspiracy and with attempting to murder a Libyan student at Colorado State University last year. Tafoya contends he merely intended to "rough up" the student and shot him only in self-defense—on assignment for the CIA.

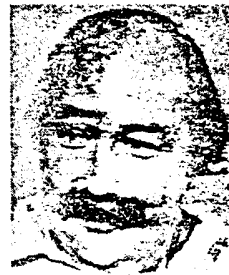
The case has attracted attention because of the possible connection with Wilson. Along with another former CIA operative, Frank Terpil, Wilson has been indicted on charges of illegally selling arms to the Kaddafi regime, recruiting other former CIA agents and Green Berets to train terrorists in Libya and setting up "hit squads" to assassinate Libyan dissidents around the world. Last week a Federal grand jury also indicted Terpil, his wife, Marilyn, and another associate on charges of selling illegal arms to the regime of Ugandan President Idi Amin in 1979. Meanwhile, a Congressional committee is investigating whether Wilson and Terpil, both now fugitives, simply traded on their old CIA connections in setting up their international network of front business concerns—or whether they had the CIA's indirect

Wilson to Tafoya, a decorated Vietnam War vet. When police arrested Tafoya last April, among the items seized at his New Mexico home were phone numbers of Wilson's London office and a bungalow on his British farm, where Tafoya reportedly stayed after the Colorado shooting, and an apparent "hit list" of seven people said to have run afoul of Wilson. Also confiscated were explosive priming devices, a record of an \$8,623 bank deposit, passports showing that Tafoya had traveled to Libya after the shooting and the tape of a 1979 phone conversation. On the tape, a voice that police say is Tafoya's discusses the firebombing of a car belonging to a Wilson enemy and appears to ask another associate of Wilson for a hit-man assignment: "Do you know somebody that should quit breathing? Permanently?"

How much of this evidence will come before the jury remains to be seen, however. Last week District Judge J. Robert Miller agreed with defense attorneys that some of it—including the taped conversation—was irrelevant to the case and inadmissible.

The ruling undercut District Attorney Stuart VanMeveren's original plan to paint Tafoya as a globe-trotting hired gun for Wilson, and last week's testimony focused more on accounts of the shooting itself. The victim, 35-year-old Faisal Zagallai, identified Tafoya as the man who visited his apart-

The victim: Zagallai



Indicted: Terpil

ment. Tafoya thought he was working for the CIA and has since been abandoned by his contacts. "This will be called the case of the soldier left out in the cold," Gerash told the jury. Tafoya claims he was approached in London by a man he assumed was a CIA agent and told that Zagallai was broadcasting statements to Arab nations that jeopardized Egyptian-Israeli peace. His mission was merely to frighten Zagallai in preparation for a warning phone call from the CIA, Tafoya says. According to Gerash, Tafoya was forced to shoot only because Zagallai had drawn a gun of his own.

The CIA has formally denied that Tafoya ever worked for the agency, and prosecutors say they do not take his claims about agency connections seriously. "I don't know if we care whether he thinks he's the CIA or King Farouk," said Assistant District Attorney Larry Abrahamson. "We're only concerned with what happened in Ft. Collins." Gerash would like to put Tafoya on the witness stand to tell his tale of self-defense and alleged CIA connections. But

Tafoya, who faces up to 48 years in prison, is reluctant to testify—disinclined to compromise old cloak-and-dagger colleagues, he says, or to incur Wilson's wrath.

Outside the courtroom, investigations of Wilson, Terpil and their alleged terrorist operations continue. This week, for example, The Nation magazine reports finding evidence that a Wilson-Terpil firm illegally sold arms and electronic-surveillance equipment to DINA,

the Chilean secret police, in 1976. Two weeks ago the CIA issued a statement denying any official role in the activities of its two former operatives; but the agency conceded that it had conducted internal investigations and subsequently disciplined some agency employees for having had improper private dealings with the pair. Whether—and why—some CIA employees continued to cooperate with Wilson is something the House Select Committee on Intelligence hopes to learn in the course of its own investigation. It seemed likely that the complex questions raised by the Wilson-Terpil case would linger long after the verdict was handed down on a small fry named Eugene Tafoya.